

BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group

May 27, 2009

Mayor William D. Euille and Members of City Council
City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Recommendations Regarding BRAC/Mark Center Transportation and Traffic Issues

Dear Mayor Euille and Members of City Council:

In view of our concerns about the current state of transportation and traffic mitigation planning relating to the BRAC-133 project, the BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group (“Advisory Group”) urges the City Council (“Council”) to adopt a resolution in which the Council:

- (1) expresses strong support in principle for direct access from I-395 to Mark Center;
- (2) requests City of Alexandria (“City”) staff to conduct a full analysis of the potential impact of such direct access from I-395 on traffic flows in all affected areas in proximity to Mark Center by October 2009; and
- (3) places a freeze on implementation of road alterations approved in connection with the 2004 Special Use Permit (SUP) for Mark Center until the full analysis is completed.

When considering adoption of such a resolution, the Council should keep in mind that according to Duke Realty and the Army, plans for road improvements need to be in place by late November 2009 and construction must begin on road improvements by April 2010 in order for the road improvements to be completed by September 2011, when the BRAC campus is mandated to be operational. Accordingly, we request that the Council adopt the resolution before it adjourns at the end of June 2009, and that you assist us in bringing to the table all of the relevant parties involved in the of BRAC-related transportation planning process, including the Army, Duke Realty, the Virginia Department of Transportation (“VDOT”), the Federal Highway Administration (“FHWA”), and City staff.

1. Potential Benefits of Direct Access from I-395 to Mark Center

Recently, VDOT issued a Mark Center (BRAC) Transportation Study (“VDOT Study”), in which it was stated that “[d]irect access to Mark Center from I-395 general purpose and HOT lanes is desirable as it would provide an additional alternative for vehicular access to Mark Center. (See VDOT Study at page 2; a copy of the VDOT Study can be accessed at <http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/VDOT%20Transportation.pdf>.)

A majority of the members of the Advisory Group share the view reflected in the VDOT Study and believe there may be significant benefits associated with direct access from I-395 to Mark Center. Therefore, we feel that it would be appropriate for the Council to adopt a resolution expressing strong support in principle for such direct access.

2. The Need for Full Analysis of the Potential Impact of Direct I-395 Access

Full analysis of the potential impact of direct access from I-395 on traffic flows in all affected areas in proximity to Mark Center is needed. Such an analysis should specifically consider traffic flows on the relevant portions of I-395; Seminary east and west of Beauregard; Beauregard north and south of Mark Center; and the applicable side streets. In addition, the analysis should evaluate how direct access would affect the viability and desirability of the road improvements that were approved as part of the 2004 SUP.

In the light of Duke Realty's assessment that plans for road improvements and the actual beginning of construction must fall within the time constraints stated above, the analysis would need to be completed by October 2009 so that the Advisory Group could review the results of the analysis and make recommendations to Council in November 2009.

City staff should be tasked with conducting the analysis. They are familiar with the areas involved and possess the necessary expertise, and therefore would be able to complete the review by October 2009. Accordingly, we recommend that Council direct City staff to conduct the full analysis in the resolution that we urge the Council to adopt.

3. Placing a Freeze on Road Alterations Approved as Part of the 2004 DSUP

Numerous members of the Advisory Group have noted that the circumstances today are quite different from when the SUP for Mark Center was approved in 2004. For example, security is now a major issue that can, and likely will, exacerbate traffic congestion; details of the I-395 HOT Lane project, including increased automobile traffic and the possibility of an inline transit station at Seminary Road, were not known; and the SUP did not contemplate an on-site transit center. In addition, direct access from I-395 to Mark Center was not considered a viable option in 2004, and now, it is very much on the table. In view of these changed circumstances, compelling arguments have been raised that the transportation improvements required in connection with the 2004 SUP may not be the best ones to make today.

In fact, similar conclusions were reached in the recently issued VDOT Study, which on page 2 stated:

The results of the traffic analysis indicate the proposed arterial improvements [approved as part of the 2004 SUP] do not adequately provide an acceptable LOS [Level of Service] and alternate access could be warranted. Direct access to Mark Center from I-395 general purpose and HOT lanes is desirable as it would provide an additional alternative for vehicular access to Mark Center.

The VDOT Study also recommended that certain other changes be made to the road alterations approved as part of the 2004 SUP (*e.g.*, dual left turns instead of triple left turns at Seminary Road and North Beauregard Street; see VDOT Study at page 25).

In light of the findings of the VDOT Study, it would seem advantageous for the Council to place a freeze on the implementation of any road alterations approved as part of the 2004 SUP pending completion of the full analysis. Therefore, we request that the Council include such a mandate in the resolution it adopts.

4. Bringing Together All of the Parties Involved in Transportation Planning

To date, the current approach to analyzing transportation and traffic issues related to the BRAC-133 project has been quite fragmented among Duke Realty, the Army, VDOT, FHWA, and the City. Moreover, there appears to be little coordination among the parties regarding the design, timing, and execution of the studies, or with respect to analyzing the results and developing recommendations in a holistic manner.

A recent example of the current fragmentation and lack of cooperation among the entities conducting the transportation and traffic studies was the response the Advisory Group received from City staff to a request for additional background materials on VDOT's I-95/I-395 Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Operational Analysis and VDOT's Seminary Road Interchange Justification Study. The Group was told that "Since the City is not contracting or managing either of these projects, we don't have the scope materials on hand."

Toward these ends, we request your assistance in helping to bring all of the relevant parties (*e.g.*, the Army, Duke Realty, VDOT, the FHWA, City staff, and the community) together to the table as soon as possible. The Advisory Group meeting to be held on June 17 at 7:00 p.m. at Burke Branch Library (4701 Seminary Road, Alexandria) represents an excellent opportunity to do so. We are confident that if you extend invitations to the relevant parties they will be eager to participate. Their participation would begin a positive dialogue among the relevant parties that the Advisory Group could seek to continue and build on in the future.

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Your consideration of our recommendations regarding these matters, which are of considerable concern to our community, is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please do not hesitate to contact me (davedexter09@starpower.net) or Vice Chair Geoffrey Goodale (Ggoodale@foley.com).

Sincerely,

David T. Dexter
Chair, BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group

cc: BRAC/Mark Center Advisory Group
U.S. Senator Jim Webb
U.S. Senator Mark Warner
U.S. Representative Jim Moran
Eugene Keller, National Capital Planning Commission
Pierce R. Homer, Secretary of Transportation, Commonwealth of Virginia
Delegate Charniele L. Herring
Delegate Robert Hull